



# The Right Tools To Get the Job Done

March 2019



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION AGENCY

# In This Issue

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Page 3 Through Page 5 — Getting to Know Executive Director Shawn Ryan

Page 5 — DAS Employee of the Month

Page 6 — Get to Know a Legislator

Page 7 — On KPIs

Page 8 — The Strategic Planning Process

Page 9 — Two Paths to Employment

Page 10 — 'Friends Helping Friends' at the Capitol

Page 11 — Under the Gold Dome

Page 12 — Georgia Blind Day at the Capitol

Page 13 — Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

Page 14 — How Many Support Systems Came Together

Page 15 — On Change and Growth



# Meet Executive Director Shawn Ryan

## GVRA's New ED Stresses Stewardship

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In February, Governor Brian Kemp named Shawn Ryan as the Executive Director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, a move that was ratified by the Georgia Vocational

Rehabilitation Services Board at a called meeting later that month.

Mr. Ryan previously served as Commissioner of the Department of Administrative Services, which provides state agencies with business services in the areas of state purchasing, risk management, human resources administration, fleet management and surplus property. Mr. Ryan is also a former president of the Georgia Student Finance Commission, which administers the state's post-secondary scholarship, grant and financial aid programs. He previously served as the director of Georgia's Integrated Eligibility System, the largest information technology project in state history and as director of communications for the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Mr. Ryan has more than a decade of experience in Washington, D.C., where he worked in the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as for the Mortgage Bankers Association and the Heritage Foundation.

He is a graduate of the University of Vermont. He, his wife Jennifer and their son

live in Atlanta and are parishioners at the Cathedral of Christ the King.

GVRA Communications sat down with Mr. Ryan for a brief question and answer session about what he's learned from his past experience and what he hopes to accomplish in the months and years to come.

**GVRA Communications:** You bring to the table experience and expertise from multiple other state agencies. What are some of the takeaways from seeing so many different sides of state government?

**Shawn Ryan:** The two most recent experiences—being President of the Georgia Student Finance Commission and Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Administrative Services—gave me the opportunity to see two agencies that function very well... agencies that did not require micromanagement on my behalf. One of the things that's very similar to GVRA is that I did not have a deep understanding of post-secondary finance when I went to Georgia Student Finance. I did not know much about DOAS and its core functions when I went there. I am learning what GVRA does, but I don't – and won't – know everything there is to know here. You need to put people in the right positions to be successful, and from my standpoint, that is not me stepping in and doing it. It's relying on subject matter experts and other leaders within the organization to fill the roles they were hired to fill. So it's understanding you can't micromanage if you want to be successful in a role like this. That's key.





Answering the question overall, I have seen what works and what doesn't work within a state agency. I think what's really important is what's possible when state of Georgia employees are motivated to excel. In all of my previous experiences, I've encountered certain challenges, and they have required folks to really go above and beyond. My experience so far is that when push comes to shove, state of Georgia employees will do what it takes to get the job done and get it done well.

**Comms:** What are some of the traits you've seen that have allowed top performers to go above and beyond as public servants?

**SR:** I think it's crucial for all of us to remember at all times that we are paid with and operate with money that was taken from the taxpayers, and we need to spend it wisely. We are an agency with a fairly large budget, and that's something we need to be paying attention to at all times.

What that means is that every dollar we have—regardless of what it's for—was either taken from one of our fellow taxpayers or it was borrowed essentially from future taxpayers, especially with the amount of federal money that's coming through here. We are running trillion dollar deficits at the federal level. That's a lot of money borrowed from future generations, so you need to be really clear about what you're planning to do with that money that's so important that you are willing to borrow it from your children. People who focus on that tend to have the right mindset for the rest of the job.

The second trait that makes a good public servant is simply remembering we are here to serve. When you come to state government, it's not about the individual. It is about the organization and its mission, which is to assist the people we are tasked with helping. In remembering that, it cuts down on the day-to-day churn of an

organization. There doesn't need to be an argument between different parts of an organization if both parties remember we are all here to serve the client. As a corollary to that, if state government is where you came to become wealthy, you're frankly in the wrong business. If you came here to make a difference, then that's who I want on my team. Because that's what you can do here. It's about the goal of the overall organization and the goal of the state of Georgia.

The last thing I would mention when talking about what makes a good public servant is that they wake up every single morning thinking about how they can make their agency, their workplace and the state of Georgia better. My experience is that people who are process-oriented are some of the most successful public servants because there are always opportunities to improve and do better than you did the day before.

**Comms:** What do you see as the agency's greatest strength?

**SR:** I think GVRA's greatest strengths are its mission and vision: the mission being employment and independence for Georgians with disabilities and our vision that every Georgian with a disability can live and work independently. If you can't get motivated by that when you come to work in the morning, not only should you not be here, I would question your humanity. This is a very noble task that we have been given. I think that's our greatest strength. If every single day we think about what we are trying to do here, then our heads will be in the right place. We're trying to get people jobs so *they* can wake up every morning with purpose and go and provide for the people who are counting on them. That's a huge strength as an organization. There are plenty of other workplaces where you won't leave everyday with the same sense of accomplishment people can get from



working here.

**Comms:** What are some areas that you think GVRA can improve upon?

**SR:** At every agency, there's always room to improve. It's just a scale of how much and what way. In particular, I'm going to be looking at our processes because I think we should be a process-driven organization. That's first and foremost. Optimizing and improving our processes.

Part of what I have been doing during my first couple weeks at GVRA is meeting with leadership and talking to them about what they believe is working and what's not. I'm going to be making sure our processes work, and I have concerns that some of the things we're doing now aren't working as well as they should.

The other thing I'm going to be doing is making sure we have the right people in the right places to accomplish our mission. You could have the best processes in the world, but if you don't have the right people to execute them, you're not going to be successful. And vice versa.

The last point I would make is that we need to make sure we are focused on the field. That is where we provide the primary value to our clients. Making sure our field operations are working properly—again, focusing on processes and people—that's how we add the most value to our clients. If those are working well, I think we are going to be doing a good job serving our clients.

**Comms:** Where do you see us in five years?

**SR:** I see us as an agency that is capable of effectively and efficiently administering the services we have been tasked with delivering. That can mean different things to different people. At its most basic level, it's "are we getting individuals with disabilities the jobs they need to provide for themselves and their families and are they able to sustain that employment?" We need to be data driven, and I hope the data bears out that we have accomplished that goal.

Personally, in five years, I see myself in the backyard throwing the lacrosse ball with Finn, who is our six-month-old son. I played lacrosse growing up and in college, and it's never too early to start working on that scholarship.

## DAS' Employee of the Month for March 2019

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**The following nomination was submitted by Niki Skrine in the category of Teamwork:**

I am pleased to nominate Stephanie Smith for employee of the month.

She is a valued team member who contributes significantly to the success of our office as well as throughout the agency. For example, she has received KUDOS for providing outstanding assistance in obtaining work histories and maintaining professionalism as she interacts with coworkers. Ms. Smith voluntarily takes on additional duties as needed. She comes to

work daily with a positive can-do attitude and willingness to get the job done.

During the last few months, she has demonstrated exceptional teamwork and cooperation in our unit. On her own initiative, she assisted our unit by mailing letters as well as alerting management of any printing issues. When a colleague was recently on leave, she completed substantially more coverage work than was required. She also assisted her colleagues by making CE notice follow up calls. This is why it is my privilege to nominate Ms. Smith for employee of the month.



# Get to Know a Legislator

## This Month We Feature Mary Frances Williams

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Mary Frances Williams was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2018. She represents House District 37, which includes part of the city of Marietta, as well as areas in west and northeast Cobb County.

Prior to her election, Mary Frances spent 34 years as a legislative and public policy advocate, working primarily for nonprofits serving women, children and families.

Mary Frances is a lifelong resident of Marietta. She earned her BA from Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana and an MSW degree from the University of Georgia.

She began her career in advocacy at Families First where she was the Director of Advocacy from 1984 to 1993. She began consulting as an advocate fulltime in 1993 and ended this work in 2018 to run for office.

Her community service has included serving as a board member and board chair of the Women's Policy Group from 2006 until its merger with the YMCA of Greater Atlanta. She is a sustaining member of the Junior League of Cobb-Marietta, serving as president from 1991-1992. She is a lifelong member of the First United Methodist Church of Marietta.

Mary Frances has received numerous awards for her work, including the Annette Bowling Advocate of the Year Award in 2017 from Easter Seals of Southern Georgia, the Carolyn Wetzel Advocacy Award in 2009 from Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies of Georgia and the Maternal and Child Health Community Service Award in 2004 from the Georgia Public Health Association. She is a member of the Leadership Georgia Class of 1993 and the Leadership Cobb Class of 1989.

Mary Frances has two adult sons, Nicholas and Benjamin. Nicholas and his wife Diane live in Philadelphia and are the parents of Mary Frances' twin grandchildren, Madison and Cooper. Benjamin lives in Marietta.



# On KPIs

## Changing How We Measure Success

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Beginning March 1, GVRA introduced Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) agency wide. These KPIs will measure the “vital signs” of our culture and values and determine our planning process going forward. There are three agency-wide benchmarks relating to customer service, strategic planning and policy.

Each administrative office and program will have three or four KPIs that will ultimately be developed into a dashboard, a visual display or scorecard that shows whether we are serving clients in accordance with our imperative and mission.

With GVRA moving towards a new metric in determining success, it's important that KPIs and their respective purpose are thoroughly understood.

KPIs:

- Are important benchmarks of an organization's culture and values.
- Are embedded into the strategic planning process.
- Play a major role in the measurement of progress towards the attainment of its planned goals.
- Are an essential feature of strategic plan implementation (i.e. plans are one thing, but making things actually happen is quite another).
- Must be periodically assessed by leadership. Without periodic assessment of progress, the planning process and ultimately the organization as a whole is likely to fail.

As a rule, the terms "Performance Measures" and "Performance Indicators" may be used interchangeably, and the use of the word "Key" as in Key Performance Indicators merely means the Performance Measures are deemed to be most important.

Out of this, KPIs should be clear-cut: they're either achieved or not. In the end, by using key performance indicators, the evaluation process will compare what was desired with what actually happened.

Indicators may in the future be refined for increased efficacy. Please be clear that the KPIs in no way replace or redefine federal indicators from federal agencies or grants, but instead reflect the kind of agency GVRA aims to be moving forward.

The rollout of these KPIs is the culmination of several months of hard work. Special thanks goes to the Office of Strategy and Innovation (OSI) as well as Administrative Office Directors and Program Directors/Co-Directors for ensuring future success through aggressive performance improvement.

KPIs will work to inform strategic planning across the agency. Read more about that on the next page.



# Planning Ahead

## Looking Toward the Future ... Strategically

By Raj Gandy, Office of Strategy and Innovation

The Office of Strategy & Innovation (OSI) will be meeting with programs in March, April and May to discuss their input into the GVRA new three-year strategic plans for FY 2020 – 2022. These meetings will be held via conference call for an hour with a strategic planning team. The current GVRA FY 2019 Strategic Plan is posted to the agency website and is also in the NAVEX policy portal along with the current strategic plans for BEP, GIB, DAS, RWS, CSC and VR. We are looking forward to these meetings, as we think about where GVRA can grow and improve over the next three years.

As we think about where the agency will be in the future, here are some strategic planning terms to keep in mind:

**Mission:** The mission expresses the essence or purpose of an organization. It gives people inside and outside the organization a common understanding of the organization's reason for being.

**Vision:** The vision is a big-picture, long-term description of what an organization aspires to become at some specified point in the future.

**Initiatives:** Key initiatives refer to the positive ideas that would propel the organization toward its vision; key issues describe the major obstacles that will hinder an organization's ability to achieve its vision.

**Goals:** Goals should be short (meaning shorter than the long-term vision) quantitative, measurable targets that the organization sets by which it will gauge its progress and for which it will be accountable.

**Strategies:** Strategies are the ideas an organization develops to address its key issues and reach its goals.

**Action plans:** The shortest-term (often one year) specific "tactical" tasks that the organization will implement in order to put its strategies into motion. Simply put, organizations that know where they want to go are much more likely to get there than organizations that don't plan their journey.

We look forward to taking these steps to ensure agency success for years to come.

# FACT:

In 2017, more than half of all accommodation requests cost employers nothing.





# Success!

## Two Paths to Employment

By Communications Specialist Tom Connelly

The Albany office of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency remains true to its mission of assisting people with disabilities in their endeavors to obtain gainful employment. **Yuwonda Anderson** and **Yorel Baisden** serve as the latest examples of this.

Ms. Anderson, who has a mobility orthopedic/neurological disability, was served by Jauna Fletcher, CRC. After initially interviewing Ms. Anderson, Ms. Fletcher devised a plan which would include VR services, such as client support services, rehabilitation technology, diagnosis and treatment of impairments, in addition to a future services assessment. Ms. Fletcher, current team lead in the Albany office, also provided job readiness training, transportation, work adjustment training and job placement assistance in her effort to successfully place this client.

As a result of Ms. Fletcher's labors, Ms. Anderson was able to secure employment at the Council on Aging in Albany. In this facility, she works 25 hours a week as a social and human services assistant. In this capacity, Ms. Anderson earns \$13 an hour. She said that because she was so impressed with the way she was treated by her counselor and staff, she would gladly recommend the agency to anyone with a

disability who is seeking employment.

Yorel Baisden, 49 years old, became a client of the agency so she could help independently support her family. Ms. Fletcher served as her counselor as well.

When Ms. Baisden became a client of the agency, she was unemployed; she had been terminated from the Dougherty County school system years earlier, due to her inability to accomplish work goals because of her disability.

As part of her plan to assist this client, Ms. Fletcher provided Ms. Baisden with services such as diagnosis and treatment of impairments, medications and prescriptions, vocational rehabilitation counseling and guidance, as well as job readiness and placement assistance and Community Work Adjustment Training at the Hilton Hotel in Albany. At the Hilton, she cleaned rooms.

Following that, Ms. Baisden secured employment at Burger King. Using the skills she learned there, she found full-time work in food preparation at Lee State prison. She continues to work there today. In this job, she earns \$8.92 an hour.

## Start Now.

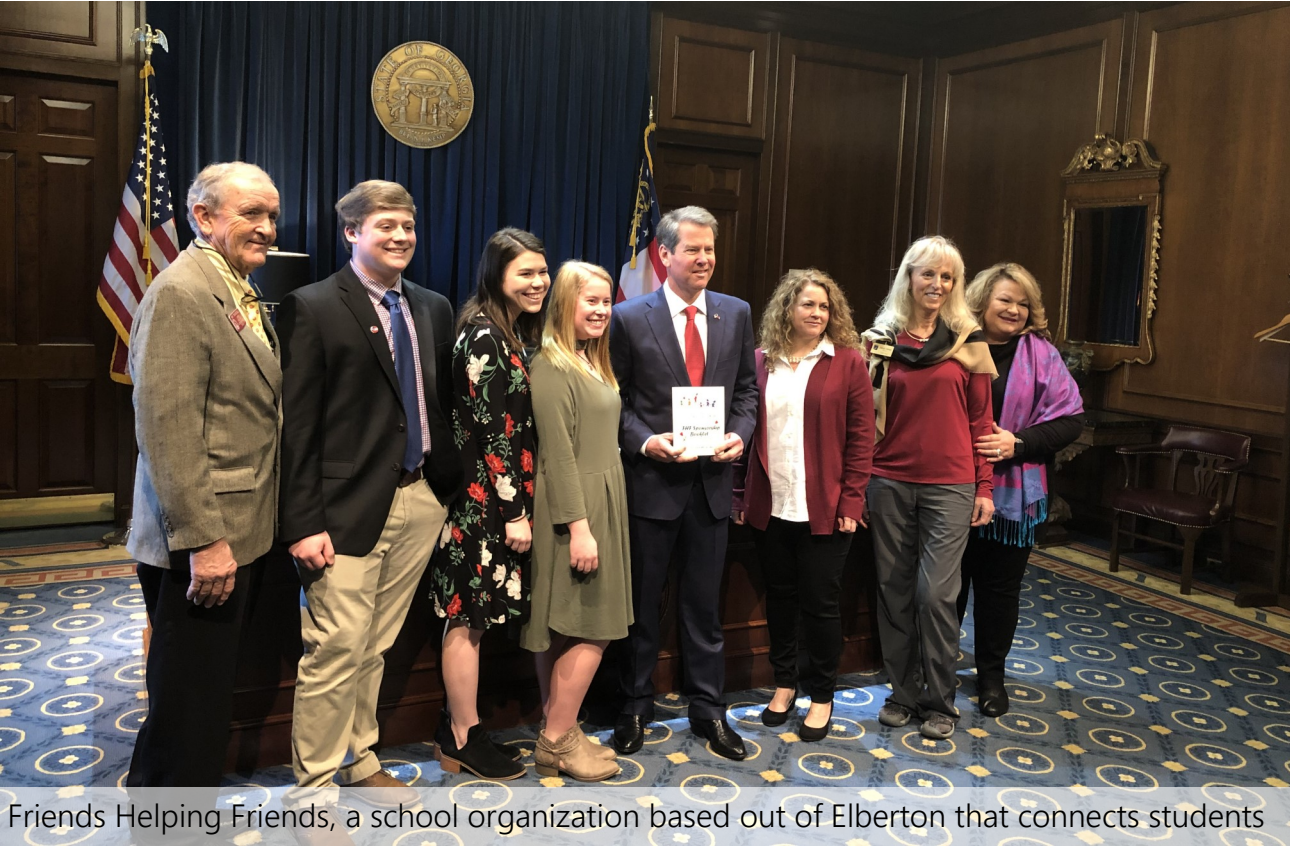
## Call the GIB Referral Hotline.

# 1.888.226.3444



# Making New Friends

## 'Friends Helping Friends' Meets Gov. Brian Kemp



Friends Helping Friends, a school organization based out of Elberton that connects students with disabilities with older peers, came out to the Capitol in late February and were able to meet with Governor Brian Kemp.





# Legislative Update

## Crossover Day Edition

By Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller



Each month in our newsletter, we are tracking legislation that potentially impacts Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and the disability community as a whole.

Crossover Day came and went on Thursday, March 7th. That's the last day for bills to cross from one chamber to the other and still have a chance of passing during the current legislative session. In the week prior, we saw progress on a variety of policies, including healthcare, voting, dyslexia screenings and many more.

Here are a few bills we are watching. These come in addition to the nearly 600 that passed their respective chamber by the first week of March:

### **HB HB79 — Child custody for persons with visual impairments**

Relating to rights of persons with disabilities, so as to provide that blind persons shall not be discriminated against by the courts, Department of Human Services, or a child-placing agency in matters relating to child custody, guardianship, foster care, visitation, placement or adoption.

### **HB122 — Possession of weapons in buildings or property owned or leased to public post secondary institutions**

Relating to carrying weapons within school safety zones, at school functions or on a bus or other transportation furnished by a school, so as to revoke the authorization for the carrying and possession of handguns in

certain manners by weapons carry license holders in certain buildings or on real property owned by or leased to public institutions of postsecondary education.

### **HR 52 — State to recognize that dyslexia has a profound educational impact that must be addressed**

Encouraging all schools, local educational agencies and the state educational agency to recognize that dyslexia has a profound educational impact that must be addressed.

### **SB3 — Program of premium assistance to enable eligible individuals to obtain health care coverage**

Provide for a program of premium assistance to enable eligible individuals to obtain health care coverage; to provide for definitions; to require personal responsibility premiums from eligible individuals; to provide for a compliance pool; to provide for any necessary state plan amendments or federal waivers; to provide for termination of the program under certain circumstances; to provide for the Legislative Oversight Committee for Health Care Premium Assistance.

*For ongoing updates, continue to stay tuned to future issues of the GVRA newsletter. And as always, our Legislative Liaison is available to answer your questions at [Charlie.Miller@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:Charlie.Miller@gvs.ga.gov).*



# Making Your Voice Heard

## Georgia Blind Day at the Capitol

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On March 4, GVRA Director of Sensory Services Denine Woodson and Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson supported the agency's blind consumers at the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Georgia's Blind Day at the Capitol. The event was aimed at promoting the support of House Bill 79, which was authored by Representatives Gilliard of the 162nd district, Bruce of the 61st district, and Thomas of the 56th district. Below is the text of that bill.

AN ACT to amend Chapter 4 of Title 30 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to rights of persons with disabilities, so as to provide that blind persons shall not be discriminated against by the courts, Department of Human Services, or a child-placing agency in matters relating to child custody, guardianship, foster care, visitation, placement, or adoption; to provide for definitions; to provide for rules and regulations; to provide for legislative findings and a purpose; to provide an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA: SECTION 1. (a) The Georgia General Assembly finds that:

- (1) Blind individuals continue to face unfair societal biases regarding their ability to successfully provide parental care;
  - (2) Blind individuals face unfair societal biases in family and dependency law proceedings, public and private adoption, guardianship, and foster care proceedings;
  - (3) Children of blind individuals are being unnecessarily removed or restricted from parental care; and
  - (4) Children are being denied the opportunity to enjoy loving homes with blind parents Or other blind caretakers.
- (b) The purpose of this Act is to protect the best interests of children parented by blind individuals or children who could be parented by blind individuals through the establishment of procedural safeguards that require adherence to due process and equal protection rights of blind parents in the context of child welfare, foster care, adoption, and family law.

On March 5, H.B. 79 unanimously passed the House and is now awaiting a vote from the Senate.



From Left: Denine Woodson, Representative Gilliard and Shirley Robinson at Georgia Blind Day at the Capitol





# Always Being Prepared

## Youth Mental Health First Aid Training

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Training focused around youth mental health first aid is currently being given to staff across the state. This is an all-day, highly-interactive training presented by instructors from the Georgia State Center for Leadership in Disability. All participants will receive a nationally recognized certificate of completion.



# It Takes a Village

## How Many Supports Came Together

By Debbie Howard, Cleveland VR

Jordan Roberson was a senior at Stephens County High School when he started working with the Cleveland Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office.

At the first meeting that Jordan had with me, he was a very quiet, shy person who was willing to please. Jordan struggled with communication in the school setting, but overcame the barriers he experienced in the work setting with the assistance of VR. Jordan is a young adult who can do anything anyone else can do he may have to do it another way.

Jordan initially had many different career interests. At first, he wanted to work at Quality Foods or Home Depot. Then, as part of his classes, he was allowed to shadow another student who works in the high school cafeteria. He cleaned tables, assisted in the lunch line and helped tidy up the cafeteria after the lunch rush was over. This led him to consider a job in food service.

At the beginning of April of last year, Jordan—along with his parent and his brother— met with me as well as Employment Consultant Lisa Dunn. At the meeting, everyone discussed Jordan's vocational options and collectively made the decision that the client would best be served by a work evaluation from Goodwill. Needless to say, Jordan won over the people at Goodwill. People skills are not an issue for him.

After meeting expectations at the work evaluation, it was determined that Jordan would start with Community Work Adjustment Training (CWAT) and also work with a job coach.

Lisa was able to work the contacts that she has made in Stephens County and get Jordan an opportunity at Pruitt Health in Toccoa. Daniele and Charles from Goodwill worked with and supervised Jordan for 3 weeks and determined he had the skills he needed to be successful. The people at Pruitt Health agreed and hired Jordan to work in the kitchen.

Jordan is considered a valuable employee who works and does everything he is supposed to do in a timely manner. He is willing to help wherever and whenever he is asked. Jordan is also famous for the hugs he gives at the end of the work day!

Jordan is a successful client because he was willing to work with anybody. He had a team of people around him helping him along the way. And sometimes, having a strong team around you makes all the difference.



**“Progress is impossible  
without change,  
and those who cannot  
change their minds,  
change nothing.”**

**~ Martin Luther King Jr.**

## Changing and Growing

By Communications Manager John Boan

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As an organization, GVRA is perennially changing and growing. This comes in response to not only the diverse and varied populations we serve but also as a result of changes in federal regulations, improvements in technology and a general eye towards doing things better than we did the day before.

This continual optimization of services extends to our various communication

channels, and that includes this newsletter.

That's where you come in.

In order to provide the best source of GVRA and disability community news, we need to hear from you. If there's ever anything you'd like to see featured in the pages of a future newsletter, please don't hesitate to email me at [John.Boan@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:John.Boan@gvs.ga.gov). Thank you for reading. See you next month.

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